

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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In the Matter of: *
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DCA-03-MM-035 *
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Thursday,
August 21, 2003

INTERVIEW OF:

LIEUTENANT WILLIAM E. SEWARD

PRESENT:

ROBERT FORD
ROB JONES
WILLIAM WOODY

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. FORD: Okay. My name is Bob Ford. I
3 have, Rob Jones is here, he is the IIC and Bill
4 Woody, who has been Human Performance and could very
5 well be switching over to Survival Factors also next
6 week.

7 You were the aircraft commander on the
8 first one?

9 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: I was.

10 MR. FORD: Okay. And just for the record, if
11 you could just state your name.

12 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: My name is Lieutenant
13 William E. Seward, U.S. Coast Guard.

14 MR. FORD: Okay. And you were the pilot on
15 one of the helicopters. Could you just --

16 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir, I was the
17 aircraft commander on the first aircraft that
18 responded to the case.

19 MR. FORD: Okay. Why don't we just have you
20 just go through the type of aircraft and then just
21 what happened that day.

22 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Okay. Well, the type of
23 aircraft, it is a HH 16 Jay Hawk. It is the largest
24 aircraft that the Coast Guard has.

25 What happened that morning? It was an

1 obviously an early morning case, just prior, just
2 shortly after seven o'clock, alarm went off. We
3 launched. Got on scene and as we were coming up on
4 scene, we spotted, you know, we spotted the vessel
5 already washed ashore. The surf was up pretty heavy
6 that day. So we came to a hover. We immediately
7 began a hasty search of the area. The only
8 information we had at the time that there was 19
9 souls in the water. We only spotted one up there by
10 the south jetty of the -- entrance. We moved in,
11 and began a hoist with our rescue swimmer, who
12 received the first person. And then we delivered
13 them immediately shoreline to awaiting EMS. We then
14 immediately took off again and resumed our search.
15 And about a hour and a half later, approximately, we
16 spotted the second person, who we recovered, and
17 again immediately delivered to awaiting EMS. We
18 continued our search with several assets on scene.
19 I think there were two 47s, my aircraft and then
20 shortly after the case, or the initial response, a
21 second aircraft was launched and also assisted in
22 the search.

23 MR. FORD: Okay. So when you got there, you
24 said the Taki Too was already sitting up on the
25 beach, right side up.

1 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir.

2 MR. FORD: Okay. And you never did hear. We
3 had heard that it flipped actually one and a half,
4 it went over bottom up and then it went another full
5 turn bottom up, and that is when the people
6 evacuated that were in the cabin, but so then you
7 only saw it right side up the whole time.

8 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir. It was
9 already washed ashore pretty much when we got on
10 scene.

11 MR. FORD: Okay. Did you see a lot of
12 debris in the water?

13 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: We did. We spotted
14 several life jackets that were empty. We spotted
15 some clothing. We spotted a mustang coat that was
16 without a person. And it, and of course, there was
17 tons of other, you know, natural debris, you know,
18 logs and, and things of that sort that were swirling
19 around that area. That is pretty much what I saw.

20 MR. FORD: And when you say logs, were
21 these, could you give me an idea of the size?

22 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Oh, gosh. I would
23 estimate some logs that were out there maybe being
24 five to ten feet. Yeah.

25 MR. FORD: And they were coming in pretty

1 continuous or you know, did you see one, maybe a few
2 minutes later, see another?

3 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: No, actually the logs,
4 we saw them in this one area right on the, on the,
5 by the, or the north jetty what it was actually, on
6 the north side of the North Jetty. The water seemed
7 to be swirling in there. And that is where we found
8 the biggest concentration of debris was, it was, it
9 was, the current was just swirling and it was
10 keeping everything in there. And we spotted one
11 life raft that maintained its position right in that
12 area and, the one with all the other debris from
13 the, from the sea. Yeah.

14 MR. FORD: Okay. This was outside the jetty?

15 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir, yeah, it was
16 on the north side of the North Jetty, is where we
17 spotted all the debris.

18 MR. FORD: Okay. From your vantage point
19 then, they haven't recovered two bodies, and it
20 would seem to me the way the surf was everything
21 should have washed onto the beach. Could you see
22 any, from above any other counter currents or
23 anything else that would have taken it south or even
24 in a due north direction?

25 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: You know, sir, I really

1 can't speculate on that because I, it is kind of
2 hard to judge currents. I mean, the only way, the
3 only tool that we have really to do is a TMB, and
4 you know, you have that information already, where
5 the TMB was plotted throughout the entire case. So,
6 yeah, I don't know of any counter currents.
7 Although I think about a week later, we did go out
8 and searching for another body, it was a body
9 spotted offshore. I think about 20 miles off
10 Tilamook Head, a passing cargo vessel spotted a body
11 in the water with a very strong scent, approximately
12 midnight and the crew, rather than waking up their
13 skipper, just logged it and left a note for him on
14 the bridge and later on that day, about eight hours
15 later they, the skipper found the note and reported
16 it to Coast Guard. Of course, we immediately
17 launched and began a search and unfortunately we
18 were unable to spot the body again. But, if you
19 want I can pull up those records for that second
20 search or that second report of a body.

21 MR. FORD: Yeah, we would like to see that
22 report. Do you know the name of the ship offhand?

23 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: No, sir, I don't. It is
24 on our records, though.

25 MR. FORD: Okay. Yeah, that would be great

1 if we could get those records.

2 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Sure, sure. Prior to
3 the date of our conversation, maybe if you would
4 just give me your mailing address and things of that
5 sort and I will make sure our TDL forwards that
6 information to you.

7 MR. FORD: Okay. You said you came from
8 Astoria Air Station, is that correct?

9 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir.

10 MR. FORD: And do you know the distance of
11 Tilamook Inlet there?

12 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: It is approximately 30
13 miles, I think. If you want I can plot it for you
14 real quick.

15 MR. FORD: No, no, that is okay. And that
16 took you pretty, not much time to get there
17 obviously.

18 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir. Our logs
19 shows us as having a 26 minute response.

20 MR. FORD: Twenty six minutes, okay.
21 Okay.

22 MR. JONES: Lieutenant, is that from takeoff
23 or notification?

24 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Pretty much from the
25 time the SAR alarm goes off to the time we are on

1 scene.

2 MR. JONES: Okay.

3 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yeah, we pulled every
4 bit of power we could with the aircraft to get there
5 as quickly as possible.

6 MR. FORD: Okay. Rob, do you want to ask, or
7 Bill?

8 MR. WOODY: No, I wasn't aware that data
9 marker buoy had been put out there. Can you comment
10 on that?

11 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: What is that, sir?

12 MR. WOODY: The DMB, data marker buoy.

13 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir.

14 MR. WOODY: There was one put out?

15 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: There was.

16 MR. WOODY: Okay.

17 MR. FORD: I am not sure if we do have that
18 information.

19 MR. WOODY: I don't think we have any
20 information on that, no.

21 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Okay. Let me talk to
22 GDO and see if they have the information where the
23 DMB was plotted and what the currents were reported
24 as.

25 MR. FORD: Okay. That sounds good.

1 MR. JONES: Lieutenant, the, the recovery of
2 the one passenger, you said it was off the south
3 jetty?

4 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: North jetty. It was on
5 the north side of the north jetty is where we
6 recovered both passengers.

7 MR. JONES: Both. Okay.

8 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes.

9 MR. JONES: And at the time you recovered
10 them, what was their status?

11 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: They were unresponsive.

12 MR. JONES: Unresponsive. Okay.

13 MR. WOODY: Bill Woody again, I had one more
14 question. On the logs, the debris, you mentioned
15 that most of the debris was north of the north
16 jetty.

17 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir.

18 MR. WOODY: And it was caught in an area
19 which was sort of like an eddy, did you make any
20 other debris at the same location?

21 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir.

22 MR. WOODY: Did you see any logs, less say
23 directly west of the entrance or anywhere else for
24 that matter?

25 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: I don't recall spotting

1 any other debris. I mean, we found the clothing and
2 other life jackets, you know, further north,
3 approximately maybe a quarter of a mile from the
4 north jetty, maybe, scattered, but not near the
5 concentration as it was on the north side,
6 immediately north, I mean, of the north side of the
7 jetty there, in that one area.

8 MR. WOODY: Yes. We have, the reason for
9 the question is we have heard of reports of logs in
10 the path of the vessels going, that were going out.

11 We just wondered if you saw any logs in the, along
12 the track say west or to the northwest of the
13 jetties?

14 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: No, not that I can
15 recall, sir. I don't remember spotting any logs out
16 there.

17 MR. FORD: Just for the record, how long
18 have you been in the Coast Guard?

19 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: I have been in the Coast
20 Guard about four years.

21 MR. FORD: And your flying experience?

22 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: I spent, oh, gee, 11
23 years in the Army, six of which were flying. So,
24 about 10 years of aviation experience.

25 MR. FORD: All, all helios?

1 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir, all helios.

2 MR. FORD: And how long have you been with
3 the group in Astoria?

4 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: One year, sir. Previous
5 to that was Air Station Kodiak.

6 MR. FORD: Okay. Which I am sure you saw
7 some action out there, too.

8 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Oh, yes, sir.

9 MR. FORD: Well, I appreciate your time.
10 Any other questions?

11 (Pause.)

12 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Not from me, sir. I
13 just need your address, so I can try to track down
14 that information for you.

15 MR. FORD: Okay. And do you think, okay,
16 your crew that was with you, we have their names
17 here. Did you think they would offer anything? We
18 don't want to have to drag them in and just go
19 through the whole exercise if there, I am sure you
20 all sat down and talked.

21 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Oh, yes, sir, yeah. We
22 have all gone through several discussions, one was a
23 crisis, intervention stress management debriefing.
24 We have all gone through that.

25 MR. WOODY: Regarding the logs again, if in

1 conversation with your crew, if it comes up that
2 somebody did spot any logs, say west or northwest of
3 the jetties, along the pass that these vessels would
4 have conversed, we would be interested in hearing
5 about that.

6 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Okay, sir. I have,
7 both crews here that are still remaining here in
8 Astoria, two of which have already PCS to other air
9 stations. My understanding is you do not want to
10 talk to them individually?

11 MR. FORD: No, I don't see any reason to
12 talk to every single one, you know, if there was
13 something that really jumped out where we wanted to
14 confirm it and get it, but --

15 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Sure. I do have the
16 other aircraft commander from the other aircraft, do
17 you want to speak with him at least?

18 MR. FORD: Yeah, we would like to at least
19 to him.

20 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Okay, sir.

21 MR. JONES: And Lieutenant, before you go,
22 just, I have got a couple. This is Rob Jones again.

23 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir.

24 MR. JONES: Just, when the rescue swimmer,
25 when he deploys into the water, does he jump or is

1 he lowered down?

2 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: No, sir, in the surf, we
3 call it a direct deployment, meaning that he is
4 lowered on a cable and does not detach.

5 MR. JONES: Okay.

6 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: And remains on the cable
7 at all times to recover the survivor.

8 MR. JONES: Okay. And the two that you
9 picked up, what was the status of their, their
10 clothing that they had on, if you know that offhand
11 or would it be better --

12 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir. The first
13 gentleman, I think, didn't have a shirt on. The
14 second gentleman was still clothed, but, had, I
15 think weighters on, both of which did not have PFDs.

16 MR. JONES: Right. And you were the 6008
17 craft?

18 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir, 08.

19 MR. JONES: Okay. And, you know, after the,
20 now, it was just two passengers that you recovered?

21 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir. We only
22 recovered two.

23 MR. JONES: Okay. And both, like you said,
24 you took right to the response teams on the beach.

25 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir, immediately.

1 MR. JONES: And how long did you stay in the
2 area for the rescue?

3 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: You know, sir, I don't
4 quite recall. I know we probably -- It was, I
5 imagine it was a few hours.

6 MR. JONES: Well, actually, Lieutenant, we
7 do have that on the long.

8 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Okay.

9 MR. JONES: The other thing I was just
10 getting at, what is the protocol for how you are
11 released from the scene, who makes that
12 determination?

13 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir. Well, mostly
14 it is driven by fuel and crew rest. But, the
15 determination is made from the, from the group duty
16 officer.

17 MR. JONES: At that, at the time you were
18 released, was it a matter of fuel and crew fatigue?

19 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir. The time that
20 the first aircraft was released, was a matter of
21 fuel and crew fatigue. We had flown a mission
22 earlier to that. It was unrelated. It was early
23 that night we had flown a mission looking for a
24 murder suspect, helping the local agency out, the
25 Sheriff's Department. So we had already had a flight

1 time on us.

2 MR. JONES: Okay.

3 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: By the time the SAR
4 alarm went off. But, we did fly a full bank and I
5 think we flew, my co pilot just gave me the, we flew
6 3.35 hours as part of that SAR case.

7 MR. JONES: Okay. So, you know, you are the
8 one that or keeps the record of it, I am just
9 surmising here, correct me if I am wrong, but you
10 report into group that you are reaching your limit,
11 either whether it is fuel or fatigue and needs to be
12 either relieved or the other one that was on scene
13 takes over?

14 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: That is correct, sir.
15 Yeah, we keep our group, what we call the SAR
16 mission coordinator, up to date of our situation or
17 our status at all times via radio. We just told
18 him, you know, we were reaching our fuel point where
19 we are going to start tapping into reserve and
20 needed RTB, you know, to give us further direction.
21 And that day, they told us to RTB, and our second
22 aircraft took over the search.

23 MR. JONES: Okay. Which was already there
24 with you, right?

25 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir.

1 MR. JONES: Okay. That is all I have,
2 Lieutenant right now. Thanks.

3 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: All right, sir. You are
4 welcome.

5 MR. FORD: Do you want me to give you my
6 e-mail address to scan and send or do you want just
7 hard mail it?

8 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Let's see here. I had
9 better hard mail, sir.

10 MR. FORD: Okay.

11 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: So, if you want I can
12 send an e-mail of mine.

13 MR. FORD: Sounds good.

14 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Okay.

15 MR. FORD: All right, my, you already have
16 my e-mail address, Fordr.

17 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: I don't think so, sir.

18 MR. FORD: Of if you have Rob Jones'?

19 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: I don't have any e-mail
20 addresses.

21 MR. FORD: Okay.

22 MR. JONES: I will just give you mine here
23 then, Lieutenant. It is [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
24 [REDACTED]

25 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: All right, sir.

1 MR. JONES: Okay.

2 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: I will send you an e-
3 mail requesting your mailing address for snail mail.

4 MR. JONES: Okay.

5 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: And you wanted, let's me
6 see, make sure, you want a DMB logs, right?

7 MR. FORD: DMB logs, yes.

8 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: And what else do we
9 need?

10 MR. WOODY: Any, any thoughts about logs,
11 any recollections of the location of any of the
12 logs.

13 MR. FORD: And that second search
14 information from that, with that ship.

15 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Oh, the second search,
16 that is right.

17 MR. FORD: Yes.

18 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: The body.

19 MR. FORD: And then if we could just talk to
20 Lieutenant JG, is it Matt Botnen, is that --

21 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Yes, sir, Matt Botnen.

22 MR. FORD: Botnen, okay. If we could just
23 talk to him and that will be great. And I
24 appreciate your time.

25 LIEUTENANT SEWARD: Oh, our pleasure, sir.

1 You stand by and I will give Lieutenant Botnen.

2 MR. FORD: Okay.

3 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)